

Make your move

Incorporate the three elements of exercise in your fitness program

The three elements of exercise — aerobic exercise, strength training and stretching — will improve your fitness level.

Aerobic exercise

Aerobic means “using oxygen.” Aerobic exercise is any exercise that causes you to breathe harder and forces your heart to beat faster to supply your muscles with enough oxygen to cover the extra demand. Aerobics directly exercises your heart muscle, strengthening your cardiovascular system and improving your body’s endurance. Aerobics lowers cholesterol and blood pressure and burns calories for weight loss. Aerobics should include at least 20 minutes of exercise at least three times a week. Popular aerobic exercises include the following:

- Brisk walking
- Running
- Swimming
- Aerobic dancing.

Strength training

Any exercise that forces your muscles to work against increasing amounts of resistance can be considered strength training. The most common methods of building muscle strength are lifting weights and using specially designed resistance machines. Push-ups are an example of a strength-training exercise that requires no special equipment.

Strength training increases the number of muscle fibers doing the work and improves the endurance of your muscles. It helps your muscles perform better at daily tasks. Increasing the size of your muscles also helps the body burn more calories at rest, a benefit for those who want to lose weight. Strength training also improves bone density and helps combat osteoporosis. Strength training should be done two or three times a week.

Stretching for flexibility

Flexibility measures a muscle’s ability to move over a wide range without stiffness or resistance. Flexible muscles are less likely to “tear” or strain than tight, inflexible ones. Stretches should be done slowly, without bouncing, and held for 10 to 20 seconds.

Warm up and cool down

In addition to the three basic elements, every exercise should include warm-up and cool-down periods. To prevent injury, warm up by starting out slowly for the first five minutes. Cool down for five to 10 minutes by gradually slowing down, walking around for a few minutes, or doing some light stretches. ■

Continued on page 12.